

POLL: I-200 PASSAGE WAS CALL FOR REFORM

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Washington state voters approved **Initiative 200** more to mend affirmative action than to end it.

That's the conclusion of a Seattle Times Washington Poll of likely voters, done on the eve of the election. Even in supporting I-200, the poll found, most voters expressed support for affirmative-action programs for minorities and women but said those programs were in need of reform.

And despite I-200 opponents' claim that voters were confused by the ballot measure, the poll found that most understood its gist and that their votes reflected their feelings about affirmative action and policies of preference.

Typical was Warren Fulton an environmental consultant from Woodinville.

"I see this as actually making a positive change. This could change how people are chosen, particularly by government and schools," said Fulton, 46, who voted for the measure.

"But minority goals in employment and student admissions can still be achieved under I-200," he said. "The secret is recruitment, training and accomplishment."

Among I-200 backers, there were twice as many voters who believed the measure would eliminate only some affirmative-action programs as those who thought it would ban such programs entirely.

For most of this year, the two campaigns debated the ultimate effect of the **initiative**, with opponents saying it would ban nearly all government affirmative action and proponents saying it would affect only some programs.

As stated on the ballot, I-200 would prohibit preferential treatment based on race, sex and national origin in state and local government employment, contracting and education.

Voters understood **initiative**

The top two reasons voters gave for supporting I-200 were that they believed it would end preferential treatment for minorities and women, and would ensure fairness and equality in the way government and public universities operate.

The poll of 500 likely voters was conducted from Friday through Sunday by Elway Research of Seattle. The Times used the results to illuminate the results of the I-200 race, as well as the U.S. Senate race between Patty Murray and Linda Smith.

"The evidence is that the voters knew what they were doing on I-200," said pollster Stuart Elway. "The plurality of both supporters and opponents favored reforming affirmative action. It became a

question of how to achieve reform, and most voters felt that a vote for **Initiative 200** was the way to do it."

Despite opponents' charges that the language of **I-200** - which began, "The state shall not discriminate against - or grant preferential treatment to - any individual or group . . ." - was misleading and would confuse voters, most of those surveyed appeared to have a good grasp of the **initiative**.

Of those supporting **I-200**, only about 7 percent said they wanted affirmative action kept as is. And among those against **I-200**, only one in 10 said affirmative action should be eliminated. Those numbers indicate that while there was some confusion over the ballot language, it was nowhere near a critical factor.

Confused voters were a small portion of the electorate, and they were evenly split between **I-200**'s supporters and opponents.

Support was widespread

The **initiative** won overwhelming support from men (66 percent), Republicans (80 percent) and Independents (62 percent), and did well among union members (54 percent). It also picked up votes from some surprising sources: about half of women, 41 percent of Democrats and 43 percent of those who voted for the re-election of Murray.

Overall, **I-200** enjoyed consistent support across all age categories, all income brackets and nearly all levels of education, as well as among both government and private employees, the poll found.

Two-thirds of the voters knew from the start of the campaign how they were going to vote, the poll found. That was especially true of **I-200** backers, with nearly eight in 10 saying they made up their minds early.

Voters who made up their minds in the last few days of the campaign split nearly evenly.

Velma Eastwood, a retiree in Spokane, and her husband went back and forth on the issue, finally deciding to vote against it.

"We know of a black person who was given a promotion over a white person, and it appeared to me that the white person was better-qualified. For that reason, we were tempted to vote in favor of the **initiative**," said Eastwood. "Then we got thinking about the women. They are not getting paid or receiving credit for what they do. So that's why we decided to vote against it."

The No!**200** campaign's last-minute television ad blitz in recent weeks apparently succeeded in eroding the support for **I-200** among women.

The ads initially featured Gov. Gary Locke, and all of them emphasized that **I-200** could eliminate affirmative-action programs aimed at boosting the opportunities and fortunes of women.

The ads caught the attention of Toni Smith, 52, a high-school English teacher from Belfair in Mason County. She just recently made up her mind to oppose it.

"I've been thinking about it again, every time those dumb ads come up. Every time, they come up in tandem: Here's one side, here's the other. I think both sides are taking extremist positions," she said.

But she admitted, "I'm partly swayed, to be honest, by Gary Locke, who so far is somebody I think is a pretty good guy."

Men favored it 2-to-1

However, the shift was not enough to offset the solid vote of men, who supported the **initiative** by 2-to-1.

And Democrats failed to deliver a vote as strongly against **I-200** as Republicans delivered for it. That happened despite the high-profile opposition of Locke, Murray and state Democratic Party leaders.

Tacoma resident Patricia Sonstreng, 60, said one of the reasons she voted for Murray is that "she's a good Democrat."

But when it came time to decide on **I-200**, she cast her vote based on personal experience.

"My husband's a longshoreman. He's a union member. But before he belonged to the union, he was a middle-aged white male," she said. "And it's very hard to get a job as a white American male."

She shrugged off Murray's and the Democrats' opposition to **I-200**.

"I have to be independent," she said. "There's not one person you can agree with totally."

In the poll, voters who had participated in at least three of the past four elections were contacted at random by telephone this past weekend. The poll has a margin of error of 4.5 percentage points.

The respondents were 91 percent white, reflecting the pool of frequent voters. The overall population of Washington is 84 percent white. Among the small number of nonwhite voters in the poll, a majority opposed **I-200**.

Many had personal stories

Overall, most voters - about six in 10 - said they are only minimally affected by affirmative action, or even not at all. But many of those interviewed said they felt it was one of the most emotional issues.

Many supporters of **I-200** in interviews recalled a personal experience and an incident affecting a relative or friend in which they felt that someone had been given a boost unfairly because of their race or gender. And they said they felt that some affirmative-action policies actually discriminate for minorities against whites, white men in particular.

I-200 was the biggest issue of this election for Christine Griffiths, a wife and mother of two in Bothell.

"This was an **initiative** I really have gone back and forth on," she said. "I believe we had to have something like the anti-discrimination laws to make some changes in the country, but they've gone

too far, and now everybody seems to be a minority group except white males.

"My son was nearly a 4.0 student. He had a 3.989, and you can't get much closer than that. But all the scholarships offered by the state went to minorities," said Griffiths.

Many said they believed affirmative action was once needed but isn't needed now. Wilbur Gates Jr., a retiree, recalled how he supported it two decades ago.

"I once supported it," he said. "I represented the women at Seattle-First National Bank. I fought very hard to get those women into something other than 'paying-and-receiving' teller jobs."

Opposed to goals

And he's seen positive change, with minorities and women doing well in many fields. But now, he said, he is against race- and gender-driven affirmative action, with its mandatory goals. "Forcing people into things is creating a hostile atmosphere," he said.

Besides, he said, programs for minorities and women are not likely to vanish. "If this **initiative** passes, there are many people who are very much in favor of affirmative action, and they will find some mechanisms to do the job."